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EDGAR SNOWDEN, JR.
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WAR NEWS.

It appears that from Wednesday last up to Saturday afternoon there was almost constant fighting all along the Rappahannock river, from where the Orange and Alexandria railroad crosses it up to the Sulphur Springs, and thence eastward to Warrenton and Catlett's Station. On Wednesday there was only a single skirmish, the Confederates driving back the Federal pickets, but retiring before a cavalry charge. On Thursday five Confederate regiments had a contest with Gen. Sigel's advance, and suffered severely. The next day (Friday) the fighting raged hotly all day along the river, the Confederates endeavoring to cross without success; but, on the contrary, a part of Gen. Sigel's force crossed, but did not hold their position. On Saturday, an artillery duel began early in the morning and lasted nearly all day, the Confederates moving up along the river with the supposed purpose of turning the right flank of the Federal army. Since Saturday there has been but little firing, and it is believed that the Confederates in turn are falling back towards Gordonsville. The losses and the number of prisoners captured on either side during the fighting are variously estimated, but the casualties cannot be very heavy nor the prisoners numerous, as there were but few close encounters.

Gen. Brown, whose headquarters are at Springfield, Mo., has ordered that all persons residing within the military district under his command come forward and take the oath of allegiance or remove beyond the lines of the army.

Major General Wright has established his headquarters at Cincinnati. Gen. Boyle commands all the forces in Kentucky excepting those at Lebanon and Lexington, which are commanded by Gen. Nelson. Gen. Burbridge assumes command at Corinth.

It is reported that Gen. Breckinridge is moving his entire army to Santanobia, and his cavalry are scouring Northern Mississippi impressing men into the army. This report comes by way of Memphis, and if true, indicates that another attack on Baton Rouge will not be made as soon as the late advices from New Orleans would imply.

It is stated that on Saturday last a squad of Confederate Cavalry appeared very suddenly at Smithfield, (a small village situated on the road from Martinsburg to Winchester, Va.) where a picket guard of Capt. Cull's Cavalry were stationed. These were surprised and captured.

The Washington Republican says:—"A dispatch from the Rappahannock, dated on Thursday last, informs us that the First New Jersey regiment, while making a gallant charge, was surrounded by two regiments of rebel infantry and one half were taken prisoners."

Gen. Breckinridge in his retreat from Baton Rouge, left his sword on the field. It is now in the possession of a private in the Ninth Connecticut Volunteers. It is a very handsome bit of steel, and bears the name in full of John C. Breckinridge.

The Washington Star says:—"Requests have come hither for the preparation of buildings to hold perhaps a thousand prisoners, taken by Pope's army so far. They are understood to be 900 taken by Sigel, on Saturday, at Waterloo (a ford a short distance above Warrenton Springs,) when, after allowing a small brigade of the enemy to cross the river, he opened his batteries and closed in his infantry so upon it as that not a man escaped; the whole being either killed, wounded or taken prisoners." This is not yet confirmed.

A letter from Falmouth, in the Washington Star says:—"Stragglers who returned last night say that Jackson has succeeded in pushing a strong force across the Rappahannock, eighteen miles above this point, thereby cutting off communication between Falmouth and Culpeper by way of the river road. Gen. Burnside is here, and quietly pushing forward his part of the programme, and when the blow does fall, look out for an eclipse of the seven days' battle. Friday and Saturday, 22d and 23d, we heard firing all day, and reports come in that Pope had captured 2,000 of Jackson's men, and driven him back eleven miles. No confirmation of the report has, however, reached here."

The Confederate cavalry, in their late dash, stopped at the Warren Green Hotel, in Warrenton, and took tea, registering their names, &c., on Thursday evening, while on their way to Catlett's Station. They returned by the same route, carrying with them some 300 horses and a number of prisoners.

From information received in various quarters, thousands of men have passed over into Virginia, principally from the eastern counties of Maryland. An entire company of cavalry left Montgomery county, on the Upper Potomac, last week, and squads are continually moving into Virginia.

The civil tribunal of Perigueux, France, has decided the test-case of Father de Lavie by declaring that there is no French law prohibiting the marriage of a Roman Catholic priest, since he does not, by taking holy orders, lose any of his rights as a citizen.

Numerous applications have been made to Senator Pomeroy for passage to Central America by free colored persons who are anxious to be among the first to enjoy the benefit of the proposed colonization.

One of the surgeons at Fortress Monroe states that from the 11th to the 16th of August no less than sixteen thousand sick men were removed from Harrison's Landing with boats of the Sanitary Commission. This, however, included many who were not positively sick, but only unable to endure long and rapid marching.

Letter from Earl Russell on British Neutrality.

FATHER POINT, Aug. 26.—By the steamship Hibernia, which passed this point this morning from Liverpool, we have received the following interesting letter written by Earl Russell to Mr. Stuart, in reply to a dispatch from Mr. Seward:

FOREIGN OFFICE,
London, July 28th, 1862.

Sir: I have left hitherto unanswered and unnoticed the despatch of Mr. Seward, Seward, which Mr. Adams delivered more than a month ago. I have done so partly because the military events referred to in it were, in the opinion of her Majesty's government, far from being decisive, and partly because there was no proposal in it upon which her Majesty's government were called upon to come to any conclusion. Events subsequent to the date of Mr. Seward's letter have shown that her Majesty's government, in their opinion upon the first of these points, were not mistaken. Victories have been gained—reverses have followed—positions have been reached in neighborhood of the capital of the Confederates, and these positions have been again abandoned. These events have been accompanied by great loss of life in battle and in hospitals.

While such measures as the confiscation bill have passed through both Houses of Congress, and with the proclamation of General Butler, at New Orleans, bear evidence of the increasing bitterness of the strife, the approach of a servile war, so much insisted upon by Mr. Seward in his dispatch, only forewarns us that another element of destruction may be added to the loss of property and waste of industry which already afflicts a country so lately prosperous and tranquil. Nor on other points to which I have adverted have I any thing new to say. From the moment that intelligence first reached this country that nine States and seven millions of the inhabitants of the great American Union had seceded and had made war on the government of President Lincoln, down to the present time, her Majesty's government have pursued a friendly, open, consistent course. They have been neutral between the two parties to this civil war. Neither the loss of raw material of material of manufacture, so necessary to a great portion of our people, nor insults constantly heaped upon the British name in speeches and newspapers, nor the rigor, beyond the usual practice of nations, with which the Queen's subjects, attempting to break loose from the blockade of the Southern ports, have been treated, have induced her Majesty's government to swerve an inch from impartial neutrality. At this moment they have nothing more at heart than to see that consummation which the President speaks of in his answer to the Governors of the eighteen States, viz: "The bringing of this unnecessary and injurious civil war to a speedy and satisfactory conclusion."

As to the course of public opinion in this country, the President is aware that perfect freedom to comment upon all public events in this country is invariably practiced—sanctioned by law and approved by the universal sense of the nation. I am, &c.,
RUSSEL.

The gunboat Unadilla arrived at New York yesterday, from Port Royal. All was quiet there. The steam ram at Savannah is reported to be a failure.

The total number of volunteers arrived in Washington since the 15th inst., including recruits for old regiments, was 19,860.